

NACNEP

National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice

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The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

The National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice (NACNEP) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) in the development of “a comprehensive and coordinated plan with respect to the health care workforce,” as directed under Section 3402 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Public Law No. 116-136). As the largest and most trusted of the health professions, nursing provides critical frontline services in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting the nation’s health.

NACNEP supports the efforts of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Health Workforce, in leading the development of this strategic plan. The Council also agrees with the broad categories of the draft framework:

- increase supply,
- promote equitable distribution,
- improve provider quality, and
- data and surveillance.

Under these broad categories, the Council recommends consideration of the following areas in the development of the strategic plan:

- **Increase supply and retention** of a diverse, inclusive health care workforce in a supportive health care environment. In addition, a severe and long-standing shortage of nurse faculty threatens the preparation and education of future generations of nurses, and hinders the leadership of nursing in advancing health care research and policy.
- **Promote equitable distribution** of the health workforce across urban inner city and rural areas through active recruitment and support of diverse candidates from these areas and by incentivizing primary care as a specialty.
- **Improve provider quality** by expanding and strengthening workforce competencies that address existing and emerging trends and issues, such as:
 - Health policy and patient advocacy,
 - Health equity, and
 - Public health emergencies.
- **Data and surveillance** to monitor progress toward the strategic plan goals in real time and adjust to anticipated as well as emerging trends.

Other feedback that the Council believes that HHS should take into consideration includes:

- Address the nurse faculty shortage and the insufficient resources for faculty and preceptor development and compensation. The lack of educators creates a critical squeeze on the efforts of nursing schools to accept more students, while the nation needs to prepare more nurses to tackle both the current pandemic and the evolving health care needs of the populace.
- Mitigate stressors associated with the expectations placed on frontline nurses in providing patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the variable response to safety concerns in some areas of the health care system. These stressors threaten to bring an increase in turnover and burnout, thereby destabilizing the nursing workforce.
- Prepare and deploy a diverse health care workforce that reflects the communities it serves to address health disparities and promote health equity.
- Bolster efforts to recruit middle and high school students into the health professions and improve access to the career pipeline. This will require partnerships with a broad array of stakeholders to increase awareness, mentorship opportunities, and financial support.
- Realign health professional education to where care is now centered – ambulatory settings and the community – and encourage more sites to accept clinical placements for students. Most health professional education remains focused in the hospital setting.
- Promote interprofessional, team-based training and education to prepare the workforce to work as a unit and work with the community, and to address population health. Include *just in time* professional competency development.
- Engage diverse stakeholders to maximize the impact of HRSA investments and help HRSA programs adapt to the changing health care environment.
- Invest in primary care efforts in the community to improve both the access to and the quality of primary care. This investment in turn promises to decrease healthcare costs, reduce health disparities, and increase community connections and trust, as well as to create better teaching and learning environments for health professionals and engage new and more diverse partners.
- Highlight the importance of addressing scope of practice issues that significantly affect access to care and health outcomes.
- Strengthen and equitably distribute the public health workforce to promote a strong, capable, agile, and globally informed response to public health concerns and emergencies.

NACNEP offers these recommendations to better prepare the workforce to address population health and care delivery trends such as the growing diversity and the rapid aging of the U.S. population, the expanded use of virtual care and telehealth, and the importance of producing and understanding accurate data analytics. These trends demand not only an increase in knowledge and skills, but also a change in attitudes and beliefs. In closing, NACNEP strongly supports the development of this health workforce strategic plan, with an emphasis on promoting resiliency, advancing interdisciplinary training, broadening scope of practice, and addressing health disparities.

Sincerely,

/s/ CAPT Sophia Russell, U.S. Public Health Service
Chair, National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice
Director, Division of Nursing and Public Health
Bureau of Health Workforce
Health Resources and Services Administration